

Application ready

Heber City, Utah 84032 — Thursday, November 11, 1976

Grant would fund repairs for track used by Creeper

A request for government assistance, to renovate the state-owned railroad track being leased to the Heber Creeper, is expected to be completed this week.

The application for \$1,135,000 in federal funds will be submitted to the regional office of the Economic Development Administration in Denver.

If approved, the grant would be used to pay for extensive repairs to the track and to build a turntable and a passing track at Bridal Veil Falls. The track is owned by the Utah Division of Parks and Recreation and leased to the Heber Creeper Corporation.

"A serious problem"

"The track is proving to be a serious problem for us," Creeper Corporation President Lowe Ashton reported. "It has been a case of neglect for three or four generations."

Ashton pointed out that the track between Heber and the "Charleston curve" is so poor that the engineers are instructed to go no faster than 10 m.p.h. He compared the experience to that of driving a car over a bumpy mountain road. It is not dangerous, he said, but will either shake the machinery to pieces or force the driver to go slower and slower.



The Heber Creeper should have a smoother, faster ride if the current grant application is approved.

Rail badly worn

The stretch south of Heber and another between Vivian Park and Bridal Veil Falls are the major problem areas, according to Ashton. Both sections were installed more than 50 years ago, he said, with rail that had already been used. The 75-lb. (weight per yard) rail is now so worn that only a small surface area touches the wheels.

"It wears like a knife blade," Ashton noted.

The grant application proposes that the worst segments be replaced with a heavier 90-lb. rail.

Ballast needs attention

Ashton indicated that many of the ties were also due for replacement, and that the ballast (bed of crushed rock under the rails) also needs attention.

In its present condition, the track will not allow the engineer to make up lost time which might have been incurred earlier in the day, he said. Hence a delay early in the day affects the whole day's schedule.

Ashton argued that such a problem would not exist if the track were in better condition. "Our equipment is capable of moving at 50 m.p.h.," he said.

He feels that an elapsed time of one hour each way would be more popular with the passengers.

"Right now we're doing very well to do it in an hour and a half."

Reduce wear and tear

Beside speeding up the operation, repairs to the track would reduce the wear and tear on the engines. The turntable proposed for Bridal Veil Falls would further reduce the strain on the locomotives, Ashton said.

The turntable would enable the locomotives to turn around at the falls so that they would no longer have to back down Provo Canyon, a process which causes excessive mechanical wear.

"Aesthetically it's poor besides being tough on the locomotive," he noted.

If the grant were approved, it would be an important first step towards a possible year-round operation.

"It would provide the nucleus for us to be able to run year-round," he said. "But it's not the only factor to solve for a winter operation."

He stressed the importance of having an auxiliary locomotive — such as a diesel-electric — which could be fired up quickly and easily in the event of a breakdown during cold weather.

A diesel-electric could also be used for the night food train, he suggested, when the glamor of the steam locomotive might not be so important.

Funds for a limited number of EDA grants

were approved recently by Congress with the passage of the Public Works Act. The act stipulated that the money was to be spent in areas where the unemployment rate was above the national average.

In Utah, Wasatch is one of five counties which meet this criteria. Summit County is another.

According to economic consultant Monte Bona, the grant proposal designates Wasatch and Summit Counties as "the project area." Utah has been authorized a total of \$9.9 million by the Public Works Act.

Decision within 60 days

Bona said that all grant applications from this state would be reviewed by the EDA regional office in Denver. A decision whether or not to approve the application must be made within 60 days, he pointed out.

If the application is approved by the EDA, Bona said that work on the project would begin almost immediately.

"The law states that work must begin within 90 days," he pointed out.